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The Custody Cartel: Inside Arizona's Network of Judicial Exploitation through the "AFCC Pipeline"

Arizona's family court system is not broken—it's functioning exactly as designed. Beneath the surface of custody disputes and therapeutic interventions lies a coordinated network of judges, attorneys, and court-appointed professionals who operate under the banner of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC). Survivors and reform advocates call it the "**AFCC Pipeline**"—a profit-driven scheme that commodifies child custody, silences protective parents, and rewards abusers with unchecked power.

This exposé features only a portion of the key players operating within what many now refer to as **"Arizona's Family Court Cartel"** and reveals how their collaboration has devastated thousands of families across Arizona. More names, more cases, and more evidence will be exposed. The survivors are speaking. The records are being compiled. The investigations are looming. And the reckoning has only just begun.

The AFCC Pipeline's Core: AFCC's Influence Over Custody Outcomes

The AFCC presents itself as a professional organization promoting "***best practices***" in family law. In reality, it functions as a closed-loop referral network where attorneys, custody

evaluators, parenting coordinators, and judges work in tandem to prolong litigation and maximize billing.

Dr. Elena Belogolovsky's investigative report, **"AFCC's Collaboration Between Attorneys and Parenting Coordinators"**, exposes how AFCC members bypass due process, suppress evidence of abuse, and enforce reunification protocols that retraumatize children. Her findings confirm what Arizona survivors have long alleged: the pipeline is not therapeutic, it's transactional.

RICO and Collusion Within the AFCC Network

The AFCC pipeline thrives not just on shared ideology but on active collusion. AFCC members routinely refer cases to one another, creating a closed circuit of influence where outcomes are preordained and financial incentives are aligned.

How the Collusion Works:

- **Attorneys** refer clients to **parenting coordinators, therapeutic interventionists (TI's), supervised visitation providers, medical or mental health professionals, Guardian Ad Litems (GAL's), children's "best-interests" attorneys (BIA), reunification specialists,** and **custody evaluators** who are known to favor their legal strategy. These professionals are appointed by judges without transparency, oversight, or meaningful recourse for families.
- **Evaluators, TI's, BIA's, GAL's, and medical or mental health providers** produce reports that align with the referring attorney's narrative, often ignoring or minimizing abuse.
- **Judges**, many of whom attend AFCC trainings or conferences, rely on these reports to justify rulings—without questioning their validity.
- **Parenting coordinators, GAL's, TI's, BIA's, reunification specialists, mental health and medical professionals, custody evaluators and anyone else appointed by the court** are granted quasi-judicial authority and immunity, issuing directives that override parental rights, often without oversight or appeal.

This collusion ensures that protective parents are discredited, abusers are shielded, and the litigation cycle continues—feeding revenue into the AFCC ecosystem. In

Arizona, like other jurisdictions, there is a group of the same professions who rotate through cases, reinforcing each other's authority while silencing critics dissent.

Patient Brokering and Institutional Exploitation

One of the most disturbing aspects of the AFCC pipeline is its role in **patient brokering**—the practice of funneling families into costly and often inappropriate services for profit. Survivors report being coerced into using specific:

- **Mental health providers**
- **Medical professionals**
- **Group homes and residential treatment centers**

These referrals are rarely optional. Parents are told that failure to comply will result in loss of custody or court sanctions. Children are sometimes forcibly committed to institutions under the guise of “therapeutic necessity,” even when trauma stems from abuse the court refuses to acknowledge.

Many of these providers have financial ties to AFCC-affiliated professionals, raising serious concerns about kickbacks, conflicts of interest, and unethical profiteering. Protective parents are forced to pay for services they did not choose, often while being denied access to their children.

This practice not only drains families financially. It retraumatizes children, isolates survivors, and deepens the court’s control over every aspect of their lives.

Kickbacks and Laundering: The Hidden Economy of Family Court

Emerging reports suggest that the AFCC-aligned family court ecosystem may be operating not just as a judicial system—but as a **financial laundering network**. Survivors and watchdogs allege that kickbacks are disguised through:

- **Nonprofit entities** posing as therapeutic, philanthropic, or legal service providers, often controlled by the same professionals appointed by the court.

- **Privately held companies** linked to evaluators, coordinators, attorneys, judges, psychologists, guardians ad litems or their families, where payments are quietly redirected.
- **Home equity loans**, several of the key players in the AFCC pipeline scheme have repeatedly acquired suspicious home equity loans that are believed to be repaid by third parties as a way to launder money and ensure their kickbacks or payoffs aren't traceable.

These mechanisms allow AFCC-affiliated actors to extract tens of thousands of dollars from families, often under the guise of “reunification therapy,” "evaluations, "or other “therapeutic services.” In many cases, families are forced to pay into a closed-loop system where the court mandates services, the professional collects the payment, and then refers the family to another professional for unnecessary services to each a kickback. Referring families to these providers also prolongs litigation, financially benefitting the attorneys.

Investigators have flagged patterns where the same professionals repeatedly refer families to unnecessary evaluators, interventionists or other service providers raising red flags for **fraud, racketeering, and abuse of judicial authority**.

This is not just a matter of ethics, it’s a matter of systemic corruption. And it’s time the financial underbelly of family court was exposed.

Arizona’s Family Court System Became a Pipeline of Trauma, Fraud, and Judicial Tyranny

In Arizona, family court is not a place where justice is served. It is a place where families are dismantled, children are silenced, and trauma is monetized. Over the past decade, a network of judges, attorneys, custody evaluators, and therapeutic interventionists has transformed Arizona's family court system into a profit-driven machine that thrives on junk science parental alienation claims, traumatic reunification therapy, and the systematic destruction of protective parents.

This is not hyperbole. It is documented fact, supported by court filings, legislative testimony, and firsthand accounts from hundreds of families. Through multiple hearings held by the Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Committee on Family Court Orders, survivors have broken their silence. Lawmakers have listened. And the names of those responsible have begun to surface including judges, attorneys, custody evaluators, psychologists, psychiatrists, therapeutic

interventionists, and supervised visitation centers whose decisions have devastated families and fueled a system built on coercion, concealment of abuse, and profit. These actors, some licensed, some not, operate under the guise of therapeutic care while enabling judicial overreach, violating constitutional rights, and silencing the very voices the courts claim to protect.

At the center of this crisis is a cast of recurring figures—some robed, some credentialed, and some operating without any license at all. Their influence spans custody rulings, property seizures, and psychological torture. Their tactics are coordinated. Their motives are financial. And their victims are overwhelmingly protective parents and children. Through court orders disguised as therapeutic intervention, these actors have not only enabled the concealment of documented abuse but have also violated core constitutional rights—due process, free speech, parental autonomy, and the fundamental right to protection from harm under the Fourteenth Amendment. Families are bankrupted. Children are destroyed—ripped from protective parents and knowingly, intentionally placed with documented abusers for profit. What unfolds in Arizona's family courts is not merely misconduct; it is a systemic betrayal of justice under the color of law.

Dr. Celice Korsten: Fraud, Psychology, and the Shadow Economy of Custody

Dr. Celice Korsten is a licensed psychologist in Arizona whose résumé includes work with the Department of Juvenile Corrections, Arizona State Hospital, and Napa State Hospital. But behind her clinical credentials lies a disturbing trail of alleged fraud, financial entanglements, and court-appointed power that has devastated families across Maricopa County.

According to this article, Korsten is deeply embedded in a network of personal and professional relationships that raise serious ethical and legal concerns. She was previously married to Brandon Howard Lederer, a businessman with a documented history of consumer fraud, deceptive contracting, and criminal charges, including theft and fraudulent schemes in State of Arizona v. Lederer (CR2018-006675). Though they are now "divorced," Korsten and Lederer reportedly maintain shared interests in companies such as Express Flooring, Healthy Home Flooring, and Home Lift Now LLC, all of which have been accused of botched installations, fraud, theft, and contract manipulation.

But it gets worse-Korsten is accused of allegedly orchestrating the removal of her husbands record from the Arizona Attorney General website, resulting in many more victims of Brandon Lederer's consumer fraud schemes.
In April 2024, the Arizona Registrar of Contractors revoked Healthy Home Flooring's license, citing "a pattern of consumer deception, unlicensed work, and refusal to correct violations." Investigative reporting suggests that Korsten and Lederer have amassed hundreds of thousands in judgments from defrauded consumers and business partners. Yet Korsten continues to be appointed in custody cases, giving her access to sensitive psychological records, therapy notes, and personal identifiers of parents and children.

Families fear that this information could be compromised, especially given Korsten's proximity to a spouse allegedly engaged in ongoing deceptive business practices, theft and fraud. Critics argue that her continued appointments reflect a failure of oversight and a dangerous breach of public trust and all families subjected to Korsten's wrath of torture treatment should be concerned about identity theft.

Kristyn Alcott: Surrogate, Scandal, and Court-Appointed Deception

Kristyn Alcott, founder of Family First Forensic Consultants, is another central figure in Arizona's family court scandal. Her name appears in multiple cases involving fabricated credentials, manipulated custody narratives, and concealed evidence of child abuse. According to YourNews, **Alcott served as the surrogate for Dr. Celice Korsten's child,** a relationship that underscores the depth of their personal and professional entanglement. Alcott has been accused of committing domestic violence, including an incident captured on video in which she allegedly assaults her own son. Despite these allegations, she continues to receive court appointments in custody cases, often in tandem with Korsten and other members of what critics call the Maricopa County Family Court Cartel.

During her testimony before the Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Committee on Family Court Orders, Alcott stated, "The court can order whatever they would like. That is why we have a court of appeals." The remark drew immediate rebuke from Senator Mark Finchem, who viewed it as emblematic of the arrogance and impunity with which court-appointed professionals operate.

Alcott's connections run deep. She is linked to Dr. Celice Korsten, a licensed psychologist whose former spouse, Brandon Lederer, was accused of fraud in *State of Arizona v. Lederer*

(CR2018-006675). Korsten paid $870,000 down on a $1.65 million home while consumers, suppliers and former business associates defrauded by Lederer seek payment on multiple judgements against them. She continues to be appointed in custody cases despite her proximity to financial misconduct and her role in evaluations that have led to the removal of children from safe parents.

Alcott's continued presence in custody litigation raises serious questions about credential fraud, ethical compliance, and the court's role in enabling unqualified actors to shape life altering decisions for vulnerable families. When parents notified the court of Alcott's lack 0f credentials, they were ignored, silenced and retaliated against.

Dr. Carol Mellen-Sysel: Evaluator of Record or Architect of Trauma?

Dr. Carol Mellen is a licensed psychologist with over 30 years of experience in forensic evaluations, psycho-legal consultation, and expert witness testimony. Her practice, detailed on her forensic website, emphasizes scientific rigor and credibility with the court. But families who have encountered Mellen in custody disputes tell a different story—one of bias, negligence, and psychological harm.

On RateMDs, Mellen-Sysel holds a 2.4/5 rating across 14 reviews, with multiple users alleging incompetence, bias, and unethical behavior. One reviewer wrote:

> "She spent one year conducting the family evaluation yet only saw the children maybe five times. In her report she stated things that I never said and later confirmed were untrue. She is extremely money hungry and all she cares about is money."

Other reviews describe her testing methods as "archaic," her office as disorganized, and her evaluations as based more on paperwork than actual therapeutic engagement. Several users allege that she misrepresented statements in court reports, failed to listen to children, and charged exorbitant fees, some exceeding $20,000.
Mellen's evaluations have been used to justify custody transfers, supervised visitation, and parental alienation claims. Critics argue that her reports often lack transparency and rely on outdated or discredited psychological models. Her name appears on the Protective Mothers

Revolution's Wall of Shame, where survivors describe her as dismissive of abuse allegations and overly deferential to court-appointed attorneys and judges.

In one federal case, Tauscher et al v. Donison et al, Mellen's evaluation was cited as contributing to a custody outcome that placed children with an abusive parent. Her dual licensure in Arizona and California allows her to operate across jurisdictions, expanding her influence in high-conflict cases.

Mellen-Sysel's name appears on watchdog lists such as the Protective Mothers Revolution's Custody Evaluators Wall of Shame, where she is cited for biased evaluations and failure to protect children from abusive environments. Survivors allege that her reports have been used to justify custody reversals, supervised visitation, and reunification therapy, often without proper investigation or child-centered analysis.

Despite her credentials, Mellen's role in Arizona's family court system has become emblematic of a larger problem: the unchecked power of evaluators whose opinions can override evidence, testimony, and the lived experiences of children. Reformers argue that her continued appointments reflect a failure of oversight and a system that prioritizes professional alliances over child safety.

The Power Couple Behind Arizona's Reunification Industry: Dr. John Moran and Diana Vigil

Dr. John A. Moran, a forensic psychologist and board member of Overcoming Barriers, has emerged as one of the most polarizing figures in the reunification therapy industry—a field increasingly criticized for its lack of regulation, coercive practices, and ties to family court corruption. Marketed by courts as an expert in "parent-child resist/refuse dynamics," Moran's programs have drawn widespread scrutiny. His intake forms openly disclaim any guarantee of physical safety, and families have reported being forced to liquidate assets—including selling their homes—to afford his intensive, court-mandated therapy sessions. According to his own Arizona Camp Declaration, the cost per family for participation in his reunification camp is $9,000, with additional fees for intake evaluations and extra family members.

Common Allegations Against Dr John Moran:

- **Dismissal of Abuse Claims**: One reviewer described how Moran ignored a 29-page intake form detailing the children's trauma and appeared surprised by basic facts already disclosed. He allegedly told the children they needed to "build their tolerance" to abuse, rather than validating their experiences.
- **Bias Toward Paying Parent**: Multiple reviews allege that Moran and his team, including Judith Lewis-Thome, favored the parent who was funding the therapy. Children's fears and disclosures were reportedly disregarded, and reports were written to support the paying party's narrative.
- **Suppression of Outside Therapy**: One family reported that Moran's team used the court to block the children from seeing their existing therapist, who had disagreed with the reunification conclusions. This left the children feeling helpless and unsupported.

Moran's professional circle includes **Judith Lewis-Thome**, listed as a "coach" despite lacking U.S. licensure, and his wife, **Diana G. Vigil**, a licensed counselor and registered play therapist. Vigil has been repeatedly named in complaints alleging biased evaluations, unethical conduct, and financial exploitation of vulnerable families. Vigil has been repeatedly named in complaints alleging biased evaluations, unethical conduct, and financial exploitation of vulnerable families. Her profile on **Judy's Book** features over 20 reviews, the vast majority of which describe deeply troubling experiences. Parents accuse her of manipulating therapy notes, lying in court, favoring the paying parent, and ignoring children's disclosures of abuse. One reviewer wrote, "She should be in prison for what she is doing to children," while another warned, "She's a pathetic excuse for a child advocate… just a monster" Together, Moran and Vigil operate within a system that critics say weaponizes mental health credentials to legitimize forced reunification, often in cases involving documented abuse.

Online platforms are flooded with negative reviews describing Moran's alleged disregard for children's disclosures of harm, favoritism toward the paying parent, and suppression of outside therapeutic support. On **RateMDs**, one reviewer wrote: "He only cares about billing… He has done nothing to try and protect this child." On Healthgrades, his profile shows mixed ratings, but lacks transparency about his reunification work. Vigil faces similar accusations, with **RateMDs** reviewers describing her as "unethical," "manipulative," and "dangerous to children."

A detailed exposé in YourNews outlines Vigil's disciplinary history, including a formal Consent Agreement with the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners for failure to report suspected child abuse and biased conduct in a custody case. The watchdog group Saving Grace Advocates alleges that she charged families up to $10,000 for evaluations and manipulated therapy notes for financial gain.

Critics argue that the couple's methods are rooted in the pseudoscience of parental alienation—a theory widely discredited by trauma experts. A peer-reviewed critique published in the *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development* highlights the lack of reliable research behind programs like Overcoming Barriers and warns of the potential for retraumatizing children through forced reunification interventions.

As Arizona's family court crisis gains national attention, Moran and Vigil have become emblematic of a broader pattern of judicially endorsed profiteering. Their intertwined roles in therapy, evaluation, and court testimony position them as central figures in what watchdogs and reformers now call the Maricopa County Family Court Cartel—a network of professionals allegedly exploiting reunification mandates for financial and political gain.

Diana Vigil: The Therapist Accused of Exploiting Trauma for Profit

Diana G. Vigil is a licensed professional counselor and registered play therapist based in Scottsdale, Arizona. Her résumé includes over 30 years of experience in child therapy, therapeutic intervention, and court-appointed evaluations. But beneath the credentials lies a trail of trauma, financial exploitation, and disciplinary action that has left families devastated.

According to YourNews and Saving Grace Advocates, Vigil has been repeatedly accused of unethical conduct, biased evaluations, and billing abuse. Families report being charged up to $10,000 for evaluations and $8,000 for focused assessments, often with little transparency or therapeutic value. Her practice, **Child Therapy AZ**, was briefly marked "Permanently Closed" on Google, and her website has been listed as "under construction" for extended periods, raising concerns about professionalism and oversight.

Vigil's disciplinary history includes a formal Consent Agreement with the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners in 2023. The agreement followed allegations of failure to report suspected child abuse, termination of services without proper referrals, and biased conduct in a high-conflict custody case. Her license was placed on probation, and she was required to complete ethics training. Though released from the agreement, the disciplinary action remains public record.

Online reviews paint a grim picture. On RateMDs and Judy's Book, Vigil holds near-bottom ratings, with clients alleging emotional damage, manipulation of therapy notes, and disregard

for child safety. One reviewer wrote: “She has the power to abuse your child and nobody is supervising or watching her… There is no way to dispute her heinous false statements to the court”

Vigil and her husband **Dr. John Moran,** a court-appointed evaluator, often work on cases together without disclosing they are married.

Despite this, Vigil continues to receive court appointments in custody cases, often recommending controversial reunification programs and failing to act on abuse disclosures. Reformers argue that her unchecked power reflects a systemic failure to protect children and hold evaluators accountable.

Stephanie Stromfors: The Best Interest Attorney with Allegiances That Raise Alarms

Stephanie Stromfors, Esq., is a family law attorney based in Chandler, Arizona, with over two decades of courtroom experience. Her firm, Stromfors Law Office, specializes in high-conflict custody disputes, guardianship, and post-decree modifications. On paper, Stromfors presents as a seasoned advocate for children’s welfare. But her repeated appointments as a Best Interest Attorney (BIA) in cases involving judicial misconduct, parental alienation, and alleged abuse have drawn scrutiny from reform advocates and survivors alike.

Stromfors is named in multiple cases involving gag orders, custody reversals, and forcing children into reunification torture camps. Public reviews accuse her of colluding with evaluators and silencing protective mothers.

According to her own firm’s website, Stromfors claims to act independently of either parent, investigating allegations and advocating for the child’s best interest. However, multiple testimonies and investigative reports suggest that her recommendations often align with judges and evaluators accused of systemic bias and misconduct. In one case, a mother alleges that Stromfors threatened to place her child in foster care unless she relinquished custody to the father despite documented abuse. The incident was described in a client review on Avvo, where Stromfors was accused of theatrical intimidation and disregard for trauma.

Notably Stromfors was appointed as the Best Interests Attorney (BIA) in the custody case involving former Major League Baseball player David Segui, a case that has come to

symbolize the dangers of unchecked judicial discretion and the misuse of reunification therapy in Arizona's family courts.

In 2021, Judge Brad Astrowsky ordered Segui's two sons to be sent from Arizona to California to attend Family Bridges, a controversial reunification camp, without Segui's consent. The decision was made at the request of the children's mother, despite Segui's documented efforts to protect his sons from her and her boyfriend, who was caught on video spraying vinegar into one of the boy's eyes.

More troubling is Stromfors' alleged affair with **Judge Brad Astrowsky**, a sitting Maricopa County Superior Court judge. The alleged affair raises serious ethical concerns given Stromfors' repeated appointments in cases presided over by Astrowsky. The overlap between personal relationships and professional appointments undermines the integrity of judicial neutrality and calls into question the fairness of custody rulings. Astrowsky, who has sent children to controversial reunification camps like Family Bridges, was retained by voters despite public outcry and investigative reporting by Michael Volpe.

Stromfors' involvement in the Segui case is not an isolated incident. Her name appears in other high-conflict custody disputes where protective parents allege that she ignored abuse disclosures, supported reunification against clinical advice, and threatened to place children in foster care unless parents complied with court orders. Survivors describe her courtroom demeanor as aggressive and punitive, often siding with evaluators and therapists who have financial ties to AFCC-affiliated entities.

Her role in the Segui case exemplifies the systemic failures of Arizona's family court system, where the "**best interests of the child**" are often interpreted through the lens of judicial loyalty and professional alliances. Reformers argue that Stromfors' continued appointments reflect a broader culture of impunity, where attorneys and judges operate without oversight, and children are forced into programs that retraumatize rather than heal.

Judge Melissa Zabor: The Quiet Enforcer of Arizona's Family Court Cartel

Judge Melissa Zabor currently presides over family court cases in **Maricopa County Superior Court**. She was appointed by Governor Katie Hobbs on **March 31, 2023**, and is slated to serve through **January 2027**. Her judicial biography includes roles as a

commissioner, attorney supervisor, and adjunct faculty member in business law. She holds a J.D. from the University of Arizona and previously worked for the Maricopa County Attorney's Office and Oracle Law Group.

While her résumé suggests a balanced legal career, Zabor's rulings in family court have drawn increasing scrutiny from survivors, watchdogs, state leaders, and reform advocates. Her courtroom has become a focal point for cases involving **ignoring abuse**, **parental alienation claims**, and the appointment of **AFCC-aligned professionals**. Critics argue that Zabor routinely upholds orders that forcibly separate children from protective parents—often based on recommendations from evaluators like **Dr. Carol Mellen, unlicensed TI's such as Kristyn Alcott,** and therapists such as **Diana Vigil**.

In one widely reported case, Zabor upheld a temporary custody order that removed children from their mother despite documented abuse and trauma disclosures. The decision was covered by investigative journalist **Michael Volpe**, who noted that Zabor's ruling aligned with a pattern of judicial deference to court-appointed professionals, even when their conduct was under investigation or lacked clinical legitimacy.

Zabor's name has surfaced in legislative hearings and survivor petitions calling for **jury trials in family court** and the **abolition of alienation-based custody reversals**. Her rulings are cited in multiple exposés, including:

- Julie M. Anderson Holburn – Arizona Parents Break Their Silence
- Arizona Today – Family Court Part III

Despite her relatively recent appointment, Judge Zabor has become emblematic of the judicial culture that reformers say prioritizes **professional loyalty over child safety**. Her courtroom decisions reflect a broader pattern of **institutional child endangerment**, where the assertion of protection is reframed as alienation, and compliance with AFCC-linked therapists becomes the court's primary metric for parental fitness.

The **Rachel Cardona-Barnett** case highlights the judicial misconduct committed by Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Melissa Zabor.

Rachel Cardona-Barnett: Survivor, Advocate, and Reform Leader

Rachel Cardona-Barnett's story is one of the most harrowing examples of how Arizona's family court system enables documented abusers while punishing protective parents. Her case has been cited in legislative hearings, advocacy campaigns, and even international human rights filings.

She has emerged as a powerful voice in Arizona's family court reform movement, drawing from her personal experience as a domestic violence survivor and protective mother who lost custody of her children under controversial judicial rulings.

Court-Appointed Controversy: Kristyn Alcott's Role

Rachel's Therapeutic Interventionist (TI) was **Kristyn Alcott**, founder of **Family First Forensic Consultants**—a figure repeatedly accused of **falsifying credentials**, **concealing abuse**, and **recommending custody to known abusers**. Alcott's involvement in Rachel's case was referenced in testimony before the Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Committee, where lawmakers raised concerns about the lack of oversight for court-appointed professionals. Rachel described how Alcott ignored abuse disclosures, ultimately contributing to the court's decision to place the children with their abusive father.

The court's decision to appoint an unlicensed, unqualified individual like Alcott has caused irreparable harm in Rachel's case and others. Advocates argue that the judiciary must be held accountable for enabling credential fraud and allowing unregulated actors to shape life-altering decisions for vulnerable families.

Judicial Misconduct and Threats Ignored

Rachel Cardona-Barnett stood before the Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Committee on Family Court Orders and delivered a harrowing account of institutional betrayal. She described how **Judge Melissa Zabor** of **Maricopa County Superior Court** ignored overwhelming evidence of violence and terror inflicted by her ex-husband, a man who had assaulted a paralegal, chased her into a school parking lot with a loaded firearm, and threatened to kill her in front of witnesses. Her children, traumatized and terrified, were recorded pleading not to be left alone with him. The court refused to listen. **Medical Reports**, **statements made by mandated reporters** and other significant evidence of child abuse and domestic violence were blatantly ignored.

Instead of protecting the victims, **Judge Zabor** weaponized the courtroom against them. Rachel was stripped of custody and ordered to pay over $100,000 to her abuser, financially annihilated for daring to protect her children. Her children were handed over to the man they feared most, in another case of state-sanctioned child endangerment.

Rachel's case is not a tragic outlier—it's one of thousands funneled into the "AFCC pipeline", a profit-driven scheme masquerading as family justice. Protective parents like Rachel are systematically drained of their resources, forced to pay for supervised visitation, court-appointed evaluators, and endless legal fees—all while abusers are shielded and empowered. The court didn't just fail her—it commodified her desperation to keep her children safe.

Julie M. Anderson-Holburn's investigative reporting further corroborates these claims. In her article "Arizona Parents Break Their Silence," she details how Cardona-Barnett waived child support and surrendered her home to escape years of abuse, only to have the court award custody to the father.

This case was also referenced in the Arizona Today report covering parent testimony before the Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Committee. Cardona-Barnett's experience was cited as evidence of how courts routinely **disregard protective orders**, **dismiss children's disclosures**, and **prioritize reunification over safety**.

International Human Rights Filing

According to a report from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) dated March 12, 2025, Cardona-Barnett filed **Petition 530-22** against the United States, alleging that domestic authorities failed to protect her and her four children from repeated domestic violence perpetrated by her ex-husband. The Commission cited violations of her rights to family integrity, protection from violence, and access to a fair trial. The petition details how her children were denied mental health care, diagnosed with PTSD, and forbidden from seeking treatment by their father—who allegedly stated, "I don't want them to talk to anyone."

The petition outlines that:

- Cardona-Barnett's ex-husband was awarded the **marital home** and **relieved of all financial obligations** toward the children as part of a court-approved agreement.
- A **protective order** was issued in her favor in 2020 after repeated harassment.

- Despite the children expressing **fear of their father** and reporting severe episodes of violence, the court **forced shared custody**.
- The children began suffering from **depression, anxiety, and enuresis**, and were **denied access to mental health services** by the father.
- The court refused to modify visitation arrangements, even as the children's trauma escalated.

The IACHR filing has drawn international attention to Arizona's family court practices and is now cited by advocacy organizations such as Human Rights Watch and End Family Court Abuse as evidence of systemic failure.

Legislative and Media Impact

Rachel's story has been featured in multiple outlets, including:

- Citizen Portal, where she advocated for jury trials in family court to prevent unchecked judicial discretion.
- 12News, which documented her efforts to help other survivors heal.
- Hoodline, covering her participation in survivor-led reform events.
- Julie M. Anderson-Holburn's exposé, which revealed how Rachel waived child support and surrendered her home to escape abuse—only to have custody awarded to the father.
- Arizona Today Report covering parent testimony before the Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Committee on Family Court Orders.
- ProspectiveDoctor in an interview with Dr. Erkeda DeRouen. Rachel shared her escape from abuse and urged healthcare professionals to become allies to victims. She described how shame and fear kept her from seeking help during medical visits, and how clinicians can play a vital role by creating safe spaces, asking the right questions, and reporting suspected abuse. Her story is now used to educate future physicians on how to recognize and respond to domestic violence and child abuse.
- Legalized Child Kidnapping, which details the loaded gun incident and judicial retaliation.

Ongoing Advocacy

Rachel continues to share her journey and legislative efforts through her Instagram account @myfivestaylive, where she documents her fight for justice, healing, and systemic reform.

Part 1

This is part 1 of a multi series exposing how Arizona's family court crisis is not a failure of oversight—it's the result of deliberate design. The AFCC pipeline has weaponized therapeutic language, judicial discretion, and professional immunity to create a system where abuse is concealed, justice is commodified, and families are dismantled for profit.

Survivors are documenting every ruling, every appointment, every financial transaction. Lawmakers are listening. Journalists are digging. Whistleblowers are stepping forward. And the public is no longer willing to accept "best interests" as a euphemism for institutional betrayal.

This is not the end of the story, it's the beginning of a reckoning. The names will be named. The records will be released. The immunity will be challenged. And the families who were silenced will be heard. Abusers and the co-conspirators will be prosecuted. Justice will finally be served.

Arizona's family court cartel is being exposed. And the system that once operated in darkness is now standing in the light.

Read more here